

REPORT FROM THE HILL *By Gregory Wirick*



Attack on Libya

■ On 15 April 1986, the House of Commons held an emergency debate over the US attack on Libya. The opposition was generally critical of the government's support for the US attack, although Liberal Leader John Turner upheld the "US objective in its strike against the core of terrorism." This appeared to put him at odds with every other Liberal who spoke in the debate, namely Brian Tobin, Warren Allmand, Charles Caccia and David Berger.

Several Conservative members also spoke. The Minister of State for External Relations, Monique Vézina, was at pains to reassure Arab nations of Canada's friendship. "The isolated acts of a single government will not be allowed to cloud our perception of the grandeur of their civilization, nor to diminish our desire for substantial and cordial relations." A couple of other Conservative MPs – Doug Lewis, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council, and Tom Hockin, the Co-chairman of the Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations – cited the statements made by the Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark during his visit to the Middle East. Clark had emphasized the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland within the territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

All five of the New Democratic Party members who spoke, including NDP Leader Ed Broadbent, who had proposed the debate, condemned the US raid.

Saad Mujber, Libya's Chief of Protocol whose three-week visit to Canada coincided with the parliamentary debate, said that he was leaving with "A very positive impression." Mr. Mujber was reported as saying that the "noncommittal" official reaction and contradictory statements in Ottawa had led him to believe that Canada had no alternative but to back the attack.

Journalists and other pundits speculated that the issue of free trade talks between the US and Canada was uppermost in the minds of government leaders at the time. These political considerations, they suggested, made officials reluctant to criticize the US raid openly.

New Parliamentary Committees

■ The parliamentary reform package which came into effect in March saw the creation of a newly-organized Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade (SCEAIT) consisting of eleven members (seven from the government, two from the Liberals and two from the New Democratic Party). The chairman of SCEAIT is Dr. William Winegard, PC, who chaired the previous Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence (SCEAND) from 1984 to 1986.

His experiences with international development organizations have convinced him to take, as the first major reference for SCEAIT, a review of the

entire Canadian official development assistance programme. The review began at the beginning of April 1986 and will be completed by June 1987. The other members of SCEAIT are: Lloyd Axworthy, Liberal Trade Critic; Pauline Jewett, NDP External Affairs Critic; Donald Johnston, Liberal External Affairs Critic; Steven Langdon, NDP Trade Critic; Robert Corbett, PC; Benno Friesen, PC; Nic Leblanc, PC; William Lesick, PC; Donald Ravis, PC; and John Reimer, PC.

The chairman of the new National Defence Committee is Patrick Crofton, PC. He was an officer in the Royal Canadian Navy from 1953 to 1971, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant-Commander.

The other members of the committee are: Derek Blackburn, NDP Defence Critic; Leonard Hopkins, Liberal Defence Critic; Stan Darling, PC; Robert Hicks, PC; Fernand Jourdenais, PC; and Allan McKinnon, PC, Minister of National Defence from 1979 to 1980.

The Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, under its chairman, George van Roggen of British Columbia, is pursuing an extensive study of the problems of international debt. Since the Senate is not obliged to set a deadline for its references, it is unclear when this study will be completed. The future of the Senate Special Committee on National Defence is also not clear, although it is known that its chairman would like to continue to investigate specific aspects of Canadian defence requirements.

Most Members of Parliament could not be happier with the new changes in their status. As columnist Jeffrey Simpson wrote in the *Globe and Mail* (16 April 1986), "The new Commons rules give committees an expanded role. The chairman of these committees, previously considered rather insignificant characters around Ottawa, are suddenly somebodies." The new reality, Simpson continued, is that "giving MPs more independence means stronger committees, making Parliament a better expression of public opinion and running the risk of producing more headaches for the Government." By the next reporting, we may have a better idea of how significant the headaches are likely to be.

Joint Committee

■ The Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Canada's International Relations – which is reviewing the government's Green Paper, *Competitiveness and Security* – completed its hearings on 25 April 1986. By then the committee had visited centres in every province and both of the territories in an attempt to gain a comprehensive sampling of public opinion. In each centre, panels were organized on topics of specific interest to the region and a wide range of individuals and groups made presentations.